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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAGHDAD 002372

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [MARR](#) [PGOV](#) [IZ](#) [KU](#)
SUBJECT: IRAQ CONTINUES TO MAKE PROGRESS ON KUWAITI MASS
GRAVES

REF: A. KUWAIT 779
[1](#)B. BAGHDAD 2108

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Classified By: Political Counselor Yuri Kim for Reasons 1.4 (b), (d).

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY: Iraq has made substantial progress recently in its search for mass graves containing the remains of Kuwaitis. Following a successful August 4 Technical Subcommittee meeting in Kuwait, the Government of Iraq (GOI) formally petitioned the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), which oversees the process, to hold the November Tripartite Committee in Baghdad. The head of Kuwait's delegation has accepted PM Maliki's invitation to visit Iraq in the next month to discuss increased cooperation between the two countries. Representatives from Iraq's Ministry of Human Rights met last week with a witness claiming knowledge of three separate sites near Ramadi containing over 100 Kuwaiti remains. Iraq's Minister of Human Rights will travel to Bosnia in mid-September to visit the International Commission on Missing Person's headquarters and DNA laboratory in an effort to increase the GOI's capacity to analyze bone samples. END SUMMARY.

Iraq steps up to the plate

[1](#)2. (SBU) Following a very constructive August 4 Technical Subcommittee (TSC) in Kuwait during which Iraq's efforts received praise (ref A), the GOI has taken steps to demonstrate its commitment to the process of recovering and excavating mass graves which may contain Kuwaiti remains. On August 24, Iraq's Minister of Human Rights, Wijdan Salim, sent a letter to the ICRC confirming the GOI's readiness to host the November 25 Tripartite Committee (TC) (Note: The TC is composed of representatives from the Governments of Iraq and Kuwait and the ICRC. End note.). Salim also noted the GOI's willingness to host the first Technical Subcommittee (TSC) in 2010 should Baghdad not be awarded the November TC.

[1](#)3. (SBU) On August 30 the ICRC's Iraq Protection Coordinator told Poloff it was "highly unlikely" that the GOI would receive the November TC, but there is a "strong possibility" that the January TSC will take place in Iraq. He praised the GOI's recent efforts, especially those of the Ministry of Human Rights' (MOHR) Director General of Humanitarian Affairs Arkan Saleh, who was appointed in May to lead Iraq's delegation. Calling Saleh "professional and dedicated," he was pleased with the progress the sides have been making recently and was optimistic that this trend would continue.

[1](#)4. (SBU) Separately, Dr. Tareq Abdullah, Director of the Prime Minister's Office, formally invited Dr. Ibrahim al-Shaheen, head of the Kuwaiti delegation to the TC, to visit Baghdad and meet with PM Maliki. According to Saleh, al-Shaheen has accepted this offer, and he and his team will

soon visit Iraq. Discussions will focus on increasing cooperation between the two countries in locating and excavating mass graves. Both sides have agreed on the importance of keeping this a humanitarian issue, unclouded by politics and other bilateral disagreements.

The "Ramadi witness" returns to Iraq

¶15. (C) In an August 27 meeting, Saleh relayed information provided by an Iraqi citizen who claims knowledge of three separate mass grave sites near the city of Ramadi in Anbar province. The "Ramadi witness" fled Iraq for Syria in 2003. He returned to Iraq only last month on PM Maliki's plane following the latter's meetings with Syrian officials in Damascus. The witness is currently working with a private, non-MOHR team in Anbar and promised to provide Saleh with three bone samples, one from each of the mass grave sites. These sites are rumored to contain, in aggregate, the remains of more than 100 Kuwaitis. The bone samples will then be sent to Kuwait for DNA analysis and comparison. If confirmed to be Kuwaiti remains, the GOI has promised to pay the "Ramadi witness" USD300,000 as compensation, according to Saleh. He was optimistic that he would receive these samples by mid-September and receptive to Poloff's recommendation that, should the samples prove positive, a joint Iraq-Kuwait team be constituted to excavate the mass graves.

Other sites in the pipeline

¶16. (SBU) In addition to the Ramadi sites, MOHR is working with the ICRC to send a former Iraqi soldier to Kuwait. The

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"Ali Al-Salem witness" claims to know the whereabouts of a site containing the remains of at least 20 Iraqi soldiers killed in an airstrike during the Gulf War, including those of the witness' brother. According to Saleh, the Kuwaiti delegation has expressed its support for this visit, and he expects to soon receive ICRC approval and assistance with logistics.

¶17. (SBU) In 2004 Coalition Forces, working in concert with a Kuwaiti excavation team, removed over 200 bodies from a mass grave site near Karbala (Iraq) to Kuwait. While the majority of these remains were of Kuwaiti origin, mixed in among them are thought to be nearly 70 Iraqis, both military and civilian. The GOI has requested the Government of Kuwait (GOK) return the Iraqi remains to Iraq, but has yet to receive an answer from the GOK.

ICMP provides much-needed assistance

¶18. (SBU) Salim, Saleh and other members of the MOHR's mass grave team will travel to Bosnia in mid-September to visit the International Commission on Missing Persons' (ICMP) headquarters and DNA laboratory. Although the GOI has steadfastly refused to send samples to Sarajevo for analysis (citing religious prohibitions), Salim and her team hope to learn from ICMP's processes. Saleh expressed hope that Iraq will improve its capacity to do DNA bone analysis (Note: The only lab in Iraq with the ability to currently run such tests, located at the Medico-Legal Institute, is controlled by the Ministry of Health. There is also a USG-funded lab in Kurdistan, scheduled to be operational by January 2010, which will have this capacity. Both of these facilities focus on evidence relating to criminal cases but could be used for bone sample analysis as well. End note.).

¶19. (SBU) DRL-funded grantee ICMP continues to provide

classroom-based training on mass grave excavation to employees from the MOHR, Ministry of Interior, and Ministry of Defense. ICMP is prepared to work with the MOHR to select sites for field training, but must first sign a currently pending headquarters agreement with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA). Post will continue to push this issue with the MFA. The conclusion of a headquarters agreement will allow ICMP to then sign a memorandum of understanding directly with the MOHR, thereby clarifying the exact types of assistance ICMP can offer at grave sites.

¶10. (C) COMMENT: The GOI has reiterated many times its desire to get out from under Chapter VII sanctions (ref B), which not only have a significant impact on Iraq's economy (requiring it to pay 5% of its oil revenues to its southern neighbor) but are an embarrassing reminder of the country's previous status as international pariah. Despite Saleh's claim that the GOI (and GOK) want to separate the mass grave issue from the more contentious issues facing the two sides, Iraq clearly views this as an opportunity to demonstrate to the international community that it is ready to take its rightful place among nations. That the "Ramadi witness" was transported to Baghdad from Damascus on PM Maliki's private plane points to the importance the GOI places on this issue. Post strongly supports Iraq's bid to host either the November TC or January TSC as a major step forward in Iraq/Kuwaiti bilateral relations. END COMMENT.
HILL